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Rocket Fired At Jordanian Jet in Athens

Hussein Shuffles Cabinet

By Richard Homan
Washington Post Foreign Service

An unidentified attacker fired a rocket at a Jordanian airliner in Athens yesterday in the fifth attack in two weeks against Jordanian interests abroad, apparently by hard-line Arab factions opposed to King Hussein's joint effort with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat to negotiate a Middle East peace.

In Amman later, Hussein announced a shuffling of his Cabinet, replacing Prime Minister Ahmad Obeidat, who had been in office only four months, with Zeid Rifai, who is known to be on much better terms with Syria, a leader of the Arab opposition to the Jordanian-PLO peace initiative. No reason was given for the change.

The rocket hit the Jordanian Boeing 727, which was preparing to take off with 62 passengers and a crew of 13, and gouged a four-inch-wide hole in the roof but failed to explode and caused no injuries, a Greek police spokesman told The Associated Press. The plane returned to the terminal.

The attacker, who fired at the plane from near the runway, dropped the rocket launcher and ran to a car, the spokesman said. He said the pilot of an Olympic Airways plane coming in to land saw the incident and alerted the control tower.

By late last night, no one had claimed responsibility for the attack, but U.S. and diplomatic sources said here that it appeared to be linked to four recent attacks against Jordanian facilities abroad, as protests against an agreement Feb. 11 between Hussein and Arafat for a joint initiative to seek peace in the Middle East through negotiations with Israel and other states.

On March 21, in almost simultaneous

attacks, grenades were thrown at Jordanian airline offices in Athens, Rome and Nicosia, Cyprus, injuring five persons. Wednesday, a rocket was fired at the building housing the Jordanian Embassy in Rome, causing damage but no injuries.

After each of those attacks, callers claimed responsibility on behalf of Black September, a Palestinian terrorist group active in the early 1970s but thought to be disbanded. In the attack in Rome on Wednesday, police arrested a suspect, who identified himself as a member of Black September.

A caller to Agence France-Presse in Paris said Wednesday, "We shall continue to strike blows to topple the mercenary Jordanian regime so that the Jordanian masses can take part in the struggle against reactionary conspiracies of the agents of Zionism and imperialism."

Sources here and in the Middle East said the name Black September apparently was being used to cover the actions of hard-line Palestinian factions backed by Syria and Libya and probably headed by Abu Nidal. He is a longtime foe of Arafat, and his faction has claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks and killings of moderate PLO figures during the past 12 years.

One U.S. source called use of the Black September name "disinformation," saying the recent attacks appeared to be the work of Abu Nidal, who now is based in Syria.

Jordanian Embassy spokesman Akram Barakat said yesterday that Jordan had "no evidence" who was behind the attacks and was "not accusing anybody." But when asked about Abu Nidal, he said there was "a strong possibility" he was involved "because he has threatened to attack . . . the moderate part of the PLO, which has joined forces with Jordan" in the peace initiative.

Rifai, the new Jordanian prime minister, is highly experienced in foreign affairs and in inter-Arab politics. He headed the government from 1973-76 and again in 1977, during a period of intense Middle East diplomacy, and he improved relations with Syria while maintaining close ties with the United States.

Obeidat, on the other hand, was a former interior minister and head of the intelligence service. Callers claiming responsibility for the recent attacks specifically had criticized Jordanian intelligence services.

Hussein's decree gave no reason for the change but said: "Our goal shall continue to be the regaining of Arab solidarity and the encouragement of inter-Arab dialogue in the interest of the Arab nation, particularly with regard to central Arab issues."

Barakat said here that "we do hope there will be a chance for a closer relationship with Syria" and that the new Cabinet would work toward this goal. "We hope the response from Syria will be positive," he said.

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GREEK SHOOTING
BY KERIN HOPE
ATHENS, GREECE

November 17, a leftist terror group which has boasted of killing two U.S. officials here, has claimed it killed a conservative Greek newspaper publisher in what it said was a campaign to "strike down CIA agents."

A U.S. Embassy spokesman dismissed as "nonsense" claims that the slain publisher, Nicholas Momferratos, had been involved with the CIA.

In Washington, CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson said, "We wouldn't have any comment on something like that. It really doesn't serve any purpose."

Momferratos, 60, chairman of the board at Apogevmatini (Afternoon) newspaper, died Thursday evening, moments after two gunmen fired a dozen bullets through a side window of his blue Mercedes limousine, striking his back and chest, Athens police said. The attack occurred in the city's fashionable Kolonaki district.

Momferratos' driver, Pangiotis Rousetis, was in "critical but stable condition" today after surgery to remove bullets from his arm and stomach, a spokesman for the Red Cross hospital in the Greek capital said.

Police sources who spoke on condition of anonymity said ballistic tests indicated a .45-caliber gun fired in Thursday's attack was the same weapon used in previous killings claimed by November 17. The other weapon was a .22-caliber gun, police said.

In a rambling, four-page typewritten leaflet found near the attack site, November 17 claimed it carried out the Momferratos killing and said: "We shall uncover and strike down CIA agents in the press."

The statement claimed Momferratos "became owner of Apogevmatini with CIA money."

A U.S. Embassy spokesman, who spoke on condition he not be identified, today said, "The charges are nonsense. We deplore the killing."

Apogevmatini, a popular Athens afternoon paper, opposes Premier Andreas Papandreou's Socialist government and supports conservative President Constantine Caramanlis, the country's head of state and a personal friend of Momferratos.

Papandreou, who condemned Momferratos' killing, met today with Caramanlis and discussed terrorism. An official statement issued afterward said the two Greek leaders "ascertained the need to intensify and organize more suitable measures to neutralize this threat."

After Momferratos was shot, three attackers drove away in a white Fiat with stolen license plates, police said. The car was later found abandoned 150 yards from the scene of the shooting, a city police spokesman said.

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The limousine smashed through the window of a luxury store selling chocolates and porcelain.

Witnesses described one of the attackers as swarthy and of medium height, and another as bearded.

The November 17 group is named after the date on which police and troops crushed a 1973 rebellion against Greece's military dictatorship by students at Athens Polytechnic University.

At that time, Momferratos was serving as industry minister in a civilian Cabinet appointed by dictator George Papadopoulos to prepare the country for elections.

Thursday's attack was the first shooting claimed by the extremist group since April 1984, when it boasted of a failed attack against U.S. Army Sgt. Robert Judd as he was driving to the U.S. Air Force base at Athens airport.

November 17 claimed responsibility for the shooting of U.S. Navy Capt. George Tsantes, an attache at the American Embassy, in November 1983. It claimed the killing of Richard Welch, CIA station chief in Athens, who was gunned down at Christmas 1975, and three Greek police officers.

In March 1983, George Athanassiadis, publisher of the Athens daily Vrachyni (Evening) was killed in his office by a gunman. A group calling itself the Anti-Military Struggle claimed the killing.

The assassination came as the Greek Parliament prepared to vote for a new president next month and is getting ready for a general election later this year.

Momferratos, an economist and president of the Greek newspaper publisher's union, served briefly as a Cabinet minister in a civilian government during the 1967-1974 military dictatorship in Greece.